



New Jersey Pinelands Commission **PRESS RELEASE**

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Pinelands Commission Releases Economic Data *Annual report tracks economic health of Pinelands communities*

NEW LISBON, NJ - Pinelands Commission Executive Director Annette Barbaccia today released the Second Annual Report of the Pinelands Long-Term Economic Monitoring Program. A cooperative project administered by the Pinelands Commission and funded by the National Park Service of the U.S. Department of the Interior, the program monitors, collects and analyzes data to gauge the economic health of the Pinelands region over time.

"The report compiles and evaluates key economic indicator data to help the Commission make informed decisions as it works to meet the mandates of the State and Federal Pinelands Protection Acts," explained Barbaccia. "This year's report offers some noteworthy findings and some new data and analytical tools that will no doubt prove useful."

The 2002 Economic Report includes, for the first time, a *municipal fact book*, which presents economic data arranged by municipality. This new addition provides a better understanding of the unique economic characteristics of each of the 53 Pinelands Area municipalities. Additionally, data for each Pinelands municipality is ranked and averages are compared using data from 202 South Jersey municipalities.

The Commission also made changes in variables collected this year, including the adjustment of monetary values from 1995 to 2000 Consumer Price Index dollars for data such as retail sales, per capita income, average property tax bill, equalized property values, median home prices, and blueberry and cranberry production and sales data. Another improvement for 2002 is the addition of block-level census data for municipalities both inside and outside of the Pinelands, which allows for more accurate comparative analysis between Pinelands and non-Pinelands area population data.

Data collected in 2002 reveals some key findings about the Pinelands economy:*

- Following a statewide surge in **building permits** issued in 2000, Pinelands building permits decreased by 23% in 2001, while the State and the non-Pinelands region of South Jersey experienced 18% and 7% declines, respectively;
- **Home sales** during 2001 increased in the Pinelands by 2.9%, increased in the non-Pinelands region by 1.7%, yet decreased statewide 4.5%;

Long-term Economic Monitoring Report

Page 2

- The total **unemployment rate** was lower in the Pinelands than statewide or in the non-Pinelands region. The rate at which unemployment grew was equal in the Pinelands and non-Pinelands, but lower than the statewide rate of unemployment growth;
- Between 1990 and 2000, **per-capita income** rose by 13% in the Pinelands, 5% outside the Pinelands and 9% statewide;
- Between 1996 and 1999, Pinelands **growth in wages** outpaced wages in the non-Pinelands region of South Jersey, however wages in the Pinelands remained lower than elsewhere;
- **Manufacturing wages** are much higher outside of the Pinelands, however **agricultural wages** in the Pinelands are much higher compared to the non-Pinelands South Jersey;
- After dropping between 1997 and 1999, **cranberry prices** rebounded by 79% between 1999 and 2001 to \$18.72 per 100 lbs. This is still below the peak level of \$67.83 in 1996;
- The **population** inside the Pinelands boundary grew 5.5% between 1990 and 2000 to 276,889 people. However portions of Pinelands municipalities that are outside of the Pinelands boundary saw 14.3% growth; and
- The **average residential tax bill** in the Pinelands was \$2,857 - \$424 lower than the non-Pinelands region of South Jersey and \$1,655 lower than the state average. The rate of increase for property taxes was also lower in the Pinelands than elsewhere.

A discussion of a special study on indicators of municipal health also appears in the 2002 Pinelands Economic Monitoring Report. Currently underway, this important study will develop a database of indicators and an objective, systematic and repeatable model to identify and characterize municipalities that are in poor economic health. The results, in turn, can be used to develop measures and allocate resources to alleviate economic strain in identified communities. Begun in early 2001, the Commission hopes to complete its research in late 2003 and issue a report shortly thereafter.

“Our preliminary research under the municipal health indicators project suggests that some of the most pressing economic concerns relate to a healthy tax base, such as promoting mixed use development,” Barbaccia said. “As we move forward with this project, the Commission will more closely examine this and other themes to help those communities that are struggling economically.”

The Pinelands Commission will make the report available free-of-charge on its website (www.nj.gov/pinelands) in the near future. Copies of the 2002 Economic Monitoring Report are available from the Pinelands Commission for \$17.50 each plus \$3.00 shipping and handling. Make checks payable to New Jersey Pinelands Commission. Payments should be mailed to NJ Pinelands Commission, PO Box 7, New Lisbon, NJ 08064.

[* Except in the case of population data, where block-level census data was available, “Pinelands” is defined as the entirety of any municipality that has at least 10 percent of its land area within the boundary of the State-designated Pinelands Area.]

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